

## **OPENING ADDRESS**

### **Senator Ron Richard, President Pro Tem First Regular Session, 99<sup>th</sup> General Assembly**

**Wednesday, January 4, 2017**

Good afternoon and THANK YOU for placing your trust in me to serve as your President Pro- Tem.

It is a high honor to do so, and, of course, it's an honor for all of us to serve the people in the Missouri Senate.

Many of you have family and friends here with you today. We welcome them to the Chamber.

Gov-elect Eric Greitens

Lt. Gov Peter Kinder

Lt. Gov-elect Mike Parson

Judge Patricia Breckenridge

Judge Dan Scott

Patty Richard

Senators and Guests

I know it's a tradition that the new President Pro-Tem gives a big speech on the first day and sets the agenda. But I'm not big on long, windy speeches.

So rather than stand here and set the agenda for 2017, I'm going to say a few words that I hope will set the TONE for 2017.....and beyond. In other words, how should we go about conducting the business of the Missouri Senate?

What we do here matters, and how we do it matters.

Take a look around. Not just at each other, but take a look at this magnificent chamber, which is at the heart of the most beautiful capitol building in America.

Why is it that Missourians- who are not unnecessarily extravagant people – decided more than a hundred years ago to build such a wonderful capitol? And not just the building itself, but all the wonderful artwork throughout the Capitol, including this very chamber?

These great Capitol decorations are not placed simply for the purpose of expounding beauty and art, but to inspire in succeeding generations patriotism. Without a knowledge of history there can be no patriotism. Without a reverence for our pioneer forbears there can be no respect for the government they sacrificed to build.

We could do our business sitting around a bunch of card tables. Instead, we are here in this grand chamber.

I think Missourians then – and Missourians now - want us to feel the weight of what we do here. They want us to feel the weight of history; to appreciate what has come before us; and to apply it to what we do in this chamber.

Look behind me and you'll see Daniel Boone at the Judgment tree. Daniel Boone loved Missouri. He built his own coffin out of the wood of a wild cherry tree he found here. He planned ahead.

On another panel you will see President Jefferson greeting Lewis and Clark. The vast amount of information Lewis and Clark gathered on their expedition was tremendously important. Lewis and Clark knew the importance of details.

Also behind me, a depiction of Senator Thomas Benton's historic speech in St. Louis in 1849. Benton wanted to build a railroad from St. Louis to the Pacific. Folks back east ridiculed the idea; nothing out west but savages, they said. In his speech, Benton said, quote – “Let us rise to the grandeur of the occasion.” – end quote. He did; and so should we.

I also draw your attention to the panel showing Frank Blair giving a speech in Louisiana, Missouri in 1866. He fought for the Union and was a fearless general. But in 1865, when the state Constitution required a loyalty oath in order to vote, or practice medicine, or preach, Blair denounced it. He took the stump in Louisiana, Missouri as a Democrat and gave the first Democratic speech in Missouri after the Civil War. He was warned that if he showed up, he would be shot.

But he showed up, anyway. Blair walked up to the platform, laid two revolvers on the desk and said, -- quote – “I understand I am to be shot if I speak here today. Perhaps we would better attend to this ceremony now.”

Nobody stepped forward. Nobody shot him. Frank Blair was a man of courage.

This is the history that should weigh upon us as we go about our business in this chamber.

Plan ahead. Pay attention to the details. Have the courage to say what needs to be said. And, of course, rise to the grandeur of the occasion.

So let us pledge to each other that in 2017 and beyond, we will conduct the business of the Senate in a way that rises to the grandeur of the great state of Missouri.

But, of course, we're human, and we make mistakes, especially in the passion of the moment. I'm sure even the greatest figures in our history fell short of what they expected of themselves from time to time. But when the moment demanded it, they rose to meet the occasion, and that's what history remembers.

How will history remember us?

I'm hoping we are remembered for respecting the institution of the Senate and each other; for restoring civility to the chamber; and that we were able to be passionate about our convictions without being combative with one another.

We have a lot to do, so I'll close now with one last bit of advice from a man I greatly admire - Winston Churchill. He might have been thinking about the Missouri Senate when he said:

Quote – “Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”

Which I intend to do.

God bless you all, and God bless the great State of Missouri.